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THE "LEICESTER" MODEL:

Experiential study of group and organisational processes

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

The 'Leicester Conference' has long been a central plank in the Group Relations Training Programme (GRTP) of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR). It is a two-week residential working conference, focusing on such issues as authority, leadership and organisation, and well over 40 have been held since the first experimental conference in September 1957 (Trist and Sofer 1959). By now, several thousand people have passed through Leicester Conferences, and others based on that model, that have been sponsored by the GRTP itself. If one adds the events arranged by other institutions that have sprung up around the world, often with GRTP support, then the number is well into five figures.

I myself had a walk-on part as a novice staff member in the second conference in 1959. That was the year when a colleague, Harold Bridger, designed the first inter-group event, in which I was assigned a consultant role (Higgin and Bridger 1964). Later I returned as a member of a training group. Since 1965 I have been on the staff of all but two or three of the Leicester Conferences, as often as not in the role of Conference Director. And, of course, I have taken these roles in many other conferences in Britain and elsewhere.

With the death in 1969 of Kenneth Rice, who had done so much to develop the 'Leicester Model' during the 1960s, I also found myself in the position of Director of the GRTP, a role that I shared for a while with the late Pierre Turquet and, in a subsequent phase, with Gordon Lawrence. This is a curious position. The Programme itself is quite modest in scope and only one among the range of 'projects' in which I am engaged as a TIHR staff member. Apart from the (currently annual) Leicester Conference, it offers only two or three other lesser events every year. An international network of a dozen other institutions have similar programmes using the Leicester Model (or the 'Tavistock Model', as it is sometimes called). In the United States, the AK Rice Institute, through its regional affiliates, has an especially large programme of conferences. Although these other institutions are organisationally independent of TIHR and of each other, the TIHR Programme is treated as the node of this network. The membership of the Leicester Conferences always has a big international component – as does the staff.

Ascribed to me, therefore is a symbolic role as custodian of the tradition. The paper that follows refers to some of the consequences of the 'institutionalisation' of the conferences. What is relevant here is the institutionalisation of me. My utterances tend to carry more weight that they often deserve.

About three years ago, Eric Trist asked me to write a paper on the Tavistock/Leicester Conferences for a three-volume collection that he, together with Hugh Murray, is assembling under the title of 'The Social Engagement of Social Science'. Trist was a found-member of TIHR (he was also Director of that first experimental conference in 1957), and the collection has the aim of reviewing the various strands of the Institute's earlier work and their subsequent development. I complied by producing a draft of the current paper. Most of it will appear in the first of the Trist/Murray volumes, which are being published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. But Trist also thought that it deserved a wider audience; so he suggested that it should also be published separately and/or expanded into a book, as a follow-up to Rice's 'Learning for Leadership', which appeared as long ago as 1965. I settled for the paper.

Whilst I hope it will be useful, I feel that need to emphasise that this is not the gospel: it is simply one person's picture, shaped by the perspective of the roles he happens to have been in.

Earlier versions of parts of this paper have previously appeared in Miller 1977, 1987 and 1988.

E J M
March 1989

INTRODUCTION

The Tavistock/Leicester Conference – or as it is now more often called, the Leicester Conference – is an intensive two-week residential event devoted to experiential learning about group and organisational behaviour, with a particular emphasis on the nature of authority and leadership. Its purpose is educational. The Conference brings together an international membership of, usually, 50-70 people drawn from a wide range of occupations and professions, in industry and commerce, education, health and social services, the voluntary sector etc. The staff group of 12 or so similarly diverse. The Conference has been held once and sometimes twice a year since 1957 – over 40 altogether.   All have been sponsored by what is now the Group Relations Training Programme (GRTP) of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR), sometimes in co-sponsorship with other organisations.

The first seven conferences were jointly sponsored by Leicester University, and almost all have been held at Leicester in one of the University's halls of residence.

The essentials of the approach, including its theoretical underpinnings, were largely established by the mid-1960s. Since then, the 'Leicester model' has provided the basis for numerous other conferences, some run by the GRTP and very many more by other institutions, in Britain and a dozen different countries around the world. In most cases these were developed with the active support of the Tavistock Institute. Around the conference work and its applications there has emerged a substantial body of literature. For a decade or more, the A K Rice Institute (AKRI), the principal exponent of the 'Leicester model' in the United States, has been organizing a biennial scientific meeting focused on the conferences and their ramifications; and the First International Symposium, jointly sponsored by GRTP and AKRI, was held at Oxford in July 1988. The theme was 'applications to social and political issues'. Some 40 papers were presented over the four days and there were nearly 200 participants.

The first part of this chapter offers a relatively brief account of the early history and later development of the approach. The second describes the emergent conceptual framework and the interplay between theory and practice. The themes of the third part are dissemination and application. Finally, the author reflects on these 30 years of experience and tries to account for the evident viability of the Leicester model in cultures as diverse as North America and India, Finland and Mexico, while looking also at issues of institutionalisation.

HISTORY

Origins

The first Leicester Conference was explicitly an experiment and it was meticulously planned and documented. "Exploration in Group Relations: a Residential Conference held in September 1957 by the University of Leicester and the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations" – that gives the title and sub0title of the published account by two of the Institute staff involved (Trist and Sofer 1959). The late Professor John Allaway, who was at that time Head of the Department of Adult Education in the University of Leicester, was Chairman of the Executive Committee that planned and ran the Conference; Eric Trist was the Programme Director.

As Allaway wrote in his introduction to the monograph, this was "the first full-scale experiment in Britain with the 'laboratory' method of training in group relations" (op.cit.: 5). This was a direct reference to the 'laboratory method' that had been developed at Bethel, Maine, from 147 onwards by the National Training Laboratorles (NTL). Based on the 'T-Group', it was a model of intensive experiential learning that had sprung directly from the work of Kurt Lewin, whose group theories had strongly influenced the early Tavistock group. His Research Center in Group Dynamics and TIHR had jointly founded *Human Relations*, a journal dedicated to the integration of the social sciences: the first volume appeared in 1947, the year in which TIHR was formally incorporated, and included Lewin's last major paper, entitled 'Frontiers in Group Dynamics' (Lewin 1947). (Later TIHR took over the journal, which has a substantial circulation.)

The affinity with Lewin was obvious. Most of those involved in setting up TIHR – social scientists and psychodynamically oriented psychiatrists – had been using group approaches to tackle practical wartime

problems. Some, for example, had created the War Office Selection Boards (Morris 1949) and later the Civil Resettlement Units, which were transitional communities for returning prisoners- of-war (Curle 1947; Curle & Trist 1947; Wilson et al 1952); while others were experimenting with approaches for the treatment of psychological casualties of the armed forces. Working at the level of the group – and indeed of the ward or hospital – proved to have rehabilitative advantages over working solely at the level of the individual; and of course it made more productive use of scarce professional resources (cf. Bion 1946; Bion and Rickman 1943; Bridger 1946, 1985; Main 1946; Sutherland 1985; Trist 1985): these were the first experiments in therapeutic communities.

However, these group approaches were influenced not only by the Lewinian stream of social psychology but also by psychoanalysis. Among those working together during the war, a number had pre-war links with the Tavistock Clinic. This had been set up after the First World War as an out-patient psychiatric clinic, with a psychoanalytic orientation, and had subsequently become an important centre for training for psychiatrists and allied professionals (Dicks 1970). From 1945 onwards, therefore, the Clinic became the natural host for a significant sub-set of the wartime group who wanted to apply their experience and approaches to the civilian world in the phase of post-war reconstruction. Others joined them. When the National Health Service was set up and the Tavistock Clinic was drafted into it, a new home had to be found for its non-clinical activities, notably this "social department". TIHR was formed for this purpose. (In addition, it took on administration of the Clinic's professional training and clinical research activities, but here I am concentrating on the "social" element, which became the responsibility of the Institute's Management Committee.)

TIHR quickly developed independent areas of work. Examples included: the Glacier Project – a major action research intervention in a manufacturing company (Jaques 1951); operation of group selection processes for industry based on the WOSB experience (Bridger & Isdell Carpenter 1947); and studies of work organisation in coal-mining (Trist & Bamforth 1951; Trist et al 1963) and in textiles (Rice 1958, 1963). Insights from psychoanalysis and group psychotherapy continued to be important – a personal analysis was mandatory for staff members until the late 1950s – and close links with the Clinic were maintained. In particular, the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, who on his return to the Clinic had developed a particular model of group psychotherapy and, from it, a new theory of group behaviour (Bion 1947 – 51, 1961), was encouraged to offer his approach as a form of training for managers and others. Consequently, it was not surprising that the Institute and Clinic (separately and jointly) were perceived as the appropriate sponsors of a British version of Bethel. Approaches came from such bodies as the Department of Social Studies in the University of Leicester, the Council of the Church Training Colleges, and, especially, a committee appointed by the then Ministry of Labour and National Service, which was implementing, in association with the European Productivity Agency, pilot projects to improve methods of industrial training. (The European Productivity Agency also promoted T-Group development in other countries, including Italy and France.)

Reputable though these bodies were, experiential learning of the Bethel type was still a novelty in Britain, and psychoanalysts somewhat suspect. Co-sponsorship by a university was seen as important in adding credibility. Allaway had the courage to back the venture on behalf of Leicester University and secured the Vice-Chancellor's support.

The organizing committee successfully approached a wide range of organisations to nominate members for that first conference. More than a third of the 45 who enrolled came from industry (many, but by no means all, in personnel and training roles). Others were drawn from: universities and other educational institutions; the Home Office (attendance of a prison governor and a deputy governor being the beginning of a long association of the Prison Service with the Leicester Conferences); the probation service; local authorities; and voluntary organisations. Eric Trist, then Chairman of the Management Committee of TIHR, led the staff group of 14.

Twenty-six of the members attended a two day follow-up session six months later. Suffice to say here that the evaluation justified mounting a second conference in 1959, followed fairly quickly by a third, fourth and fifth in 1960-1961. Leicester University's co-sponsorship extended over the first seven conferences – it ended with the retirement of John Allaway and of his colleague, Professor J W Tibble, who had also become actively involved.

Developments in Design

In the earliest conference the central event was the small Study Group, consisting of 9-12 members, a staff consultant and a staff observer. Its task was to study its own behaviour, as a group, in the here and now. The other main events were lectures ("social theory sessions") and Application Groups, which were intended between them to help members make sense of their Study Group experience and consider how it might be applied in their external roles. There were also plenary review sessions. This design was broadly similar to that at Bethel, though the equivalent Bethel T-Group was larger – up to 20. Also the Leicester consultant's orientation was less person-centred: it addressed the dynamics of the group, and it concentrated on interpretation rather than facilitation. The 1959 Conference saw the experimental introduction of an Inter-Group Event, in which members were asked to divide into groups and negotiate an agreement on how to use vacant slots in the programme. Consultants helped to interpret the inter-group dynamics (Higgin & Bridger 1964).

In 1962, TIHR gave authority to Kenneth Rice to take over leadership of the group relations conferences. The reasons were largely pragmatic: the conferences had been losing more money than the Institute could afford, and Rice was willing to try to make them more financially viable. This was no easy task. At that time, even more than now, there was a cultural assumption that education was a free or low-cost commodity, which was a reasonable assumption if it was being provided by university staff whose salaries were covered by State subsidies. TIHR lacked that luxury: being unsubsidised, its staff salaries and all other outgoings had to be covered by revenue generated from consultancy and other services. Rice did indeed succeed in making the conferences self-financing, but only because he and other staff colleagues were committed enough to accept nominal remuneration. (And it is still the case, in 1989, that, in order to keep membership fees at a level acceptable to non-commercial organisations, payments to staff remain modest.)

However, Rice's major contribution to the conferences was not economic but technical and conceptual. The period of his direction saw at least four significant developments in design (cf Rice 1965). The first was the innovation of the Large Group. Its task was the same as for the small Study Group, but it included all the members (sometimes 70 or more) with 2-4 consultants. Secondly, the Inter-Group Event was re-defined as having a single task: the membership was to form itself into groups and to study their interrelatedness 'in the here and now'. Thirdly, a second type of inter-group event (later developed into the Institutional Event) was introduced, in which the focus of study was the member-staff relationship within the conference institution as a whole. Finally, as a natural consequence of increasing the emphasis on experiential learning in the here and now, the lectures were reduced and eventually dropped. Plenary sessions and Application Groups were retained, and there was increasing use of interim Review Groups, to give members and opportunity to reflect on their experience in the "here and now" sessions.

The 'single-task' model introduced by Rice, with its insistence on the study of the here and now, had some critics within TIHR. They believed the interpretive stance was too threatening to some members and could inhibit learning rather than encourage it. Accordingly, Harold Bridger, who was centrally involved in the earlier Leicester Conferences and had introduced the inter-group experiment in 1959, developed an alternative conference model, based on a 'two-task' design. In this, membership groups are given specific assignments **and** study the dynamics of the groups in tackling them. Bridger continues to organise these conferences through TIHR and in association with other institutions. That model, however, is outside the scope of this chapter. It may be added that externally, particularly in the United States, the term 'Tavistock model' was applied indiscriminately to both, which was a source of confusion. More domestically, there was a period when the two models and their two protagonists, Rice and Bridger, were set up as rivals – a rivalry over legitimacy. In retrospect it is plain that they are complementary.

Despite some subsequent theoretical and technical developments, the Leicester Conference model of today was essentially established by the time Rice died in 19069. Then, as now, a typical day's programme in the first week would comprise four one-and-half-hour sessions, with a break in the afternoon or evening; Small Study Group (SSG) and Large Study Group (LSG) in the morning; and two sessions of Inter-Group (IG). In the second week, the Institutional Event (IE) would replace the IG, and towards the

end there would be Application Group (AG) and Plenary (P) sessions. Some conferences also include the Very Small Study Group (VSSG), of 5-7 members (see Gosling 1981).

Thus the SSG has become only of several settings for the here and now study of the relatedness of individual, group and organisation. The Conference as a whole, comprising both members and staff, is designed as a temporary educational institution, which can be studied experientially as it forms, evolves and comes to an end.

It also became clear during the 1960s that "group relations" was too broad and vague a descriptions of what was being studied. To be sure, it has always been characteristic of the Leicester model that the focus of interpretation has been on the dynamic of the group as a whole, and not on individuals. In the early days (and I speak from painful personal memories) a trainee consultant would feel grateful to identify any group-as-a-whole dynamic at all. With experience, however, although the consultant may still feel lost at times, often there is an evident choice of interpretations that might be made. Rice recognized that the definition of the **primary task** of the Conference as a whole and of the events within it was therefore important. In the early 1960s he was defining the primary task of the Conference as "to provide those who attend with opportunities to learn about leadership" (Rice 1965: 5). He then worded it more precisely in terms of studying the nature and exercise of authority. Recognition that there are choices in the definition of primary task and, therefore, in the focus of interpretation, enlarged the scope of conference design.

Thus the late 1970s saw the introduction of a series of Leicester Conferences with the title "Individual and Organisation: the Politics of Relatedness". These alternated with more 'traditional' Conferences on the theme of "Authority, Leadership and Organization" which still continue. In these, the primary task is defined in some such terms as this:

> "to provide opportunities to study the exercise of authority in the context of inter-personal, inter-group and institutional relations with the Conference Institution."

The primary task of each event is defined in relation that overall definition.

Nowadays alternate conferences make special provision for members with previous Leicester (or similar) experience: in some sessions they work separately from 'first-timers'; in others jointly. Other conferences include a Training Group, members of which have usually already taken part in at least two residential conferences. The first such group was introduced in 1963. Initially this was designed to expand the pool of potential staff. It now has the broader aim of helping people to understand and practice the consultant role in group and organisational settings.

THE INTERPLAY OF THEORY AND METHOD

In the first Leicester Conference in 1957, the Study Group was the only experiential event. Groups met for twelve one-and-a-half-hour periods over the two weeks. They were designed to enable members to explore group processes and their own involvement in them – processes that were held to be inherent in any human group but that were much more visible in the single-task Study Group setting. They were central to the aim of the Conference as a whole, which was – to quote Allaway again – "to encourage in those who participate a constructively analytical and critical approach to the way they perform their roles in the groups to which they belong" (Trist & Sofer 1959: 6). Ten years later, that remained the aim, but as a result of the developments in design we had begun to realize that the Conference as an organisation was no longer a **context** for experiential events, which now also included the study of large group and inter-group processes; it was in itself also part of the phenomena to be explored.

This extension was linked to a central aspiration of the Institute, expressed in the sub-title of *Human Relations*: a "Journal of Studies towards the Integration of the Social Sciences". At least some of us, including especially Rice, were even more ambitious and envisaged an ultimate unifying theory of human behaviour. The Conferences seemed to offer one potential matrix within which such a theory might begin to be developed and tested.

Our central theoretical and practical interest was and remains what we later came to term 'relatedness': the processes of mutual influence between individual and group, group and group, and group and organisation, and beyond that, the relatedness of organisation and community to wider social systems, to society itself. In all these forms of relatedness there is a potential tension. As Bion (1961) had showed, the individual needs groups in order to establish her/his identity, to find meaning in her/his existence, and to express different aspects of her/himself. Correspondingly, the group also needs the individual member for its own collective purposes – both to contribute to the group's task and also to participate in the processes through which the group acquires and maintains its own distinctive identity. But this process is one that often threatens individuality.

As with individuals, so with groups in relations to organisations, and wider systems. 'Group' and 'organisation', however, are not entities, with an objective reality; they are ideas or constructs that we hold in our minds. A particular group is a construct substantially shared, explicitly or implicitly, by a number of individuals. But – except in the restricted biological sense – 'individual' too can similarly be conceived as a construct, a reification. Thus the relatedness – and the associated tension – is more appropriately conceptualised as connecting not two entities, individual and group, but two processes – individuation and incorporation – moving towards, but never reaching, individual autonomy on the one hand and submergence in the group on the other. Although, to avoid clumsy circumlocutions, I shall continue to use the terms 'individual', 'group' etc in this paper, these qualifications need to be borne in mind: the terms are always to be seen as problematic.

This theoretical perspective is central to the conceptualisation of the Conference model; and obversely the Conferences themselves illuminate the theory.

However, the primary task of the Conference is not to contribute to theory but to provide members with opportunities to learn about their own involvement in these dynamics – with a specific focus on learning about the nature of authority and the problems encountered in its exercise. More generally, the aim is to enable "the individual to develop greater maturity in understanding and managing the boundary between his own inner world and the realities of his external environment" (Miller 1977: 44; cf. Miller & Rice 1967: 269) – in other words, to struggle to exercise one's own authority, to manage oneself in role and to become less of a captive of group and organisational processes (Lawrence and Miller 1976; Lawrence 1979). This is a more precise formulation of aim than Allaway's in 1959. It is probably one that would be accepted by many psychoanalysts. It certainly expresses a set of values that have run through much of the Tavistock Institute's work, not only in these conferences, but, for example, in the development of semi-autonomous work groups.

In this part of the paper I attempt to elaborate the conceptual framework that underlies the Conference design and method for carrying out this primary task. I go on to consider the role of staff in this context. In the third section I review some of the phenomena that are produced and emerging theoretical understandings, particularly in inter-group and large group settings. Finally, I say something about the nature of learning.

Conceptual Framework

I have postulated elsewhere (Miller 1976 a) that in the field of human behaviour no conceptual framework is complete without a statement of the role of the observer and his/her relation to the observed. There is an obvious link to sub-atomical physics, as illuminated by Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty: whether the behaviour of electrons is perceived in terms of particles or waves depends on the frame of reference. If within a group I address myself to a person, I confirm his/her identity as an individual; if I shift my focus to the level of the group, the notion of the bounded individual appears as a reification. Putting it another way, we can say that the appropriateness of a frame of reference is measured against the task of the person using it. In that paper I was arguing that the conceptual framework that Rice and I developed for the study of organisation (Miller & Rice 1967) was appropriate for an action research/consultancy relationship in which we were collaborating with clients as actors in understanding and perhaps modifying their roles in the organisation. Similarly the conceptual framework that underpins Leicester Conferences rests on a definition of role and task in which we are not flies-on-the-wall, or observing phenomena through a one-way screen, but are trying to enable the Conference members to understand and gain greater control over the situations they are in. We are integrally part of the process, not outside it. Indeed, the basic framework of the Leicester model is identical to the framework underlying much of the Institute's organisational consultancy: in both cases the consultant's method involves proposing working hypotheses that may be tested by the client.

The intellectual inheritance from Lewis is particularly his insistence, from the late 1930s onwards, on the importance of studying the 'gestalt' properties of groups as wholes:

> ".... There is no more magic behind the fact that groups have properties of their own, which are different from the properties of their sub-groups or their individual members, than behind the fact that molecules have properties which are different from the properties of the atoms or ions of which they are composed …
>
> "In the social as in the physical field the structural properties of a dynamic whole are different from the structural properties of sub-parts. Both sets of properties have to be investigated …" (Lewin 1947: 8)

Bion, in his development, at the about same time, of an approach to group psychotherapy was similarly focusing on the group-as-a whole. He was coming at the problem from a background as a psychoanalyst; whether or not he was influenced by Lewin's ideas is uncertain (Bion 1947-51, 1961). In brief, Bion's postulate is that at any given time the behaviour of a group can be analysed at two levels: it is a **sophisticated group** (or **work group**) met to perform an over task; and it is at the same time a **basic group**, acting on one, and only one, of three covert **basic assumptions** (fight-flight, dependence and pairing), to which its individual members contribute anonymously and in ways of which they are not consciously aware. It is a function of the basic assumption operating at any one time to keep at bay emotions associated with the other two assumptions – primitive emotional states belonging to the 'proto-mental system' – that may be inconsistent with the overt task. Thus for a seriously ill patient admitted to hospital it will be appropriate to create a culture of uncritical dependency on the doctors and nurses, rather than fighting them or running away; in the early stages of recovery, pairing with, say, the nurse may well serve to sustain hope and investment in an independent future; and finally, for discharge to be possible, 'flight' needs to be mobilised and to this end both dependency and pairing have to be suppressed. One the other hand, subordinates who accept total and uncritical dependence on an incompetent superior are storing up trouble for themselves and for their organisation. The basic group, therefore, modifies – often detrimentally, sometimes positively – the goals and activities of the work group. The behaviour manifested by a group does not necessarily reflect the conscious intentions of its members. As we shall see below, Bion's conceptualization has been further extended by others (eg Rice 1951, 1969; Turquet 1974).

Bion's formulation is one element of the psychoanalytic components in the framework. A second is the formulation of Melanie Klein (of whom Bion was a follower) of processes of infant development and their effects on adult life (eg Klein 1959). She identified the 'paranoid-schizoid position' as that early phase of development in which the infant does not yet distinguish between impulses and their effects, between inside and outside. His phantasy is that the objects he wishes to attack and destroy – notably the 'bad breast', the uncaring mother – are actually damaged and will take revenge on him with equal destructiveness. Hence the dominant anxiety in that phase is paranoid, and the dominant defence to cope with that anxiety is schizoid – an unconscious splitting of the 'good object' (gratifying breast, mother) from the 'bad object' (depriving breast, mother). Then comes the 'depressive position', the phase when the infant is facing the reality that it is often the same object – the same breasts, the same mother – that is sometimes satisfying, sometimes frustrating. With this comes the gradual maturing of the ego function, which distinguishes between what is real in the outside world and what is projected from inside. However, those primitive processes of splitting and projection are never wholly overcome, and they are constantly reactivated in adult life in relations, for example, between followers and leaders, between groups, and between nations. They are indeed the stuff of basic assumption behaviour which Bion himself linked to "psychotic anxiety and mechanisms of splitting and projective identification … characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions" (Bion 1961: 164).

Psychoanalysis, besides suggesting that explanations for human behaviour in groups may be found in primitive and unconscious processes, has also provided a role-model for Tavistock staff working not with individual patients but with groups and organisations. Nearly all the Institute's work in the 1950s and 1960s (and much of it still today) was a form of action research in which the research worker was also a consultant, taking a professional role in relation to the client system; and indeed consultancy was the method through which research data were generated. Individuals and groups interact in order to find ways of giving meaning to their experience and also to develop mechanisms that can defend them against uncertainty and anxiety (cf Wilson 1951; Jaques 1953, 1955; Menzies 1960); these defences, often unrecognised and deeply rooted, are threatened by prospects of change; hence it is an important part of the consultant role to serve as a container during the 'working through' of change. A still more specific derivation from the analyst's role has been the stress laid on examining and using the transference and counter-transference within the professional relationship. That is to say, the way in which the consultant is used and experienced, and also the feelings evoked in her/him, may offer evidence of underlying and unstated issues and feelings in the client system: that which is repressed by the client may be expressed by the consultant. Again this was a cornerstone of Bion's approach to groups.

Those features of the framework described so far were thus part of the conceptual input into the earliest Leicester Conferences. The distinctive additional contribution through Rice was the application of a much more fully developed organisational model derived from **open systems** theory (von Bertalanffy 1950a, 1950b). Systemic thinking as such was not novel: Lewin's formulation was mentioned earlier. Already too there had emerged, mainly from the Institute's early studies of coal-mining (Trist & Bamforth 1951), the concept of the **socio-technical system**. This provided a way of examining, and possibly reconciling, the relationship between the psycho-social and the techno-economic elements of purposeful organisations. Its immediate application was at the level of the primary work-group. The notion of the open system made it possible to look simultaneously bother at the relationship between social and technical and also at the relationships between the part and the whole, the whole and the environment – including, of course, the individual and the group, the group and the organisation. And, despite Lewin's assertion quoted above, it suggests that "the structural properties of a dynamic whole" may not be so different from "the structural properties of sub-parts"; both may be seen as having similar systemic characteristics.

A key connecting concept, derived from Lewin (1935, 1936) and developed in the open systems formulation, is that of **boundary**. The existence and survival of any human system depends upon continuous interchange with its environment, whether of materials, people, information, ideas, values, or fantasies. The boundary across which these 'commodities' flow in and out both separates any given system from, and links it to, its environment. It marks a discontinuity between the task of that particular system and the tasks of the related systems with which it transacts. Because these relations are never stable and static, and because the behaviour and identity of the system are subject to continual renegotiation and redefinition, the system boundary is best conceived not as a line but as a region. That

region is the location of those roles and activities that are concerned with mediating relations between inside and outside. In organisations and groups this is the function of leadership; in individuals it is the ego function.

The leadership exercised in this region can protect the internal sub-systems from the disruption of fluctuating and inconsistent demands from the outside; but it also has to promote those internal changes that will enable the system to be adaptive and indeed proactive in relation to its environment. The health and ultimately the survival of a system therefore depends on an appropriate mix of insulation and permeability in the boundary region (Miller & Rice 1967).

From the late 1950s onwards, Rice and some of his colleagues *myself included) practising organisational consultancy were using the open system formulation in conjunction with the notion of **primary task** (Rice 1958, 1963). At a fundamental level, it was postulated that a purposeful human system at any given time has a primary task, in the sense of the task that it must perform if it is to survive. In consultancy it was (and is) used as a heuristic concept, which allows us to explore the ordering of multiple activities (and of constituent systems of activity where these exist). "It makes it possible to construct and compare different organisational models of an enterprise based on different definitions of its primary task ..." (Miller & Rice 1967: 25). The definition indicates the throughput and the kind of relationship with the environment – in terms, for example, of sources of intakes and customers for outputs – that are necessary to keep the enterprise in business. This in turn identifies the **activities** that will be required – of people, of machines, or of both – to convert the intakes into outputs and to transact with systems in the environment. Boundaries between sets of activities define **task systems**, around which organisational boundaries may potentially be drawn. These are socio-technical sub-systems within the enterprise as a system. (Discrepancies between task-system boundaries and organisational boundaries are inherently problematic: cf Miller 1959). Finally, people – the human resources of the enterprise – carry **roles** through which they contribute the requisite activities to the task of the enterprise.

It was this conceptual apparatus of open system and primary task, derived from consultancy to client organisations, that Rice brought to bear on the design of the Leicester Conference in the early 1960s (Rice 1965). (Rice had presented a series of lectures in the first conference on an early version of the open systems framework and on its application to work organisation in textiles.) As we have seen, he was very insistent on identifying the primary tasks of the Conference as a whole and of the constituent events. Boundary became a critical concept: time boundaries, territorial boundaries and especially role boundaries – between staff and member, between the different roles that might be taken by the same person at different times. Beyond that are the boundaries between person and role, between the inner world of the individual and the external environment.

This notion that the individual too can be conceptualised as an open system developed in the mid-1960s and perhaps took us one small step closer to the ultimate goal of a unified theory of human behaviour. Rice explicated this in a seminal paper (Rice 19690; see also Miller 1976b). I shall return to the implications of this.

Practice: the Role of Staff
People invited to join the staff at Leicester have been members of at least two residential conferences and probably also a Training Group. They may first have taken a staff role in a shorter conference, perhaps non-residential. Usually each staff group includes at least two – often more – staff from related institutions: these will have had considerable staff experience in other conferences, often including directorship.

In the early conferences it was considered mandatory that study group consultants should be analysts or at least have had an extended analysis. This reflected the inheritance from group psychotherapy and from Bion in particular. Analysts were the obvious candidates for an approach that involved interpreting the transference of the group as a whole onto the consultant; and they were likely to be more attuned to, and less dismayed by, unconscious processes. Moreover, the organizers were concerned about the possibilities of individual disturbance in the intensive group setting; it seemed prudent to have a clinician in the consultant role.

By the early 1960s, with increasing demand for conferences, it became clear that insistence on this qualification would severely constrain growth and dissemination. In the interim initial anxieties about the effects on individuals had turned out to be exaggerated, so that clinical experience was not needed. Indeed, it could sometimes draw the consultant's attention towards an individual and away from the group. Moreover, other events, besides the study groups, had been added and the task and boundaries were more clearly defined and held. And finally, experience with growing numbers of members showed that clinical training was not correlated with insight and learning.

The capacity to be in touch with one's own shifting experience in relation to the group – of being pushed and pulled, attacked and ignored – and to reflect that back to the group, preferably with some explanation of why it might be happening – that, of course, remained a central criterion: the group process is not something extraneous, merely to be observed and commented upon. But the fundamental qualification for consultancy seemed to be an ability to stick to the task and role. Accordingly, the early training groups included university teachers, managers from industry and prison governors among others.

Leicester Conference Directors have continued to be people with analytic experience, though not necessarily analysts; and indeed for the first twelve years there was a policy that the Director role should **not** be taken by a psychiatrist. It was argued that under psychiatric leadership the membership would be more likely to produce 'patients' and that the stance of the Conference might tilt away from the educational towards the therapeutic.   By 1970, however, the model was firmly enough established to make that less of a risk. Psychiatrist-Directors may be marginally more likely to be offered situations that would mobilize them in the psychiatric role; but they have learned to resist the temptation.

The Conference Director is appointed by the sponsoring institution(s). The Director is initially responsible for Conference design and the appointment of staff. By accepting the invitation, staff members are individually confirming the Director's authority; but the staff group as a whole, including both consulting and administrative staff, is conceived as collectively the 'management'. As such, staff have the shared responsibility for providing the boundary conditions – of task definition, territory and time – within which all participants, themselves included, can engage with the primary task of the Conference. Hence the authority of the Director has to be confirmed by the staff group at their pre-Conference meeting, and that authorization has to be kept under review as the Conference proceeds. Once the Conference has begun, **the staff group has the authority to replace the Director**. If there is irreconcilable disagreement between the Director and one or more staff members, then one or the other has to resign. Although in practice this has never happened, it has nearly happened; and it is vital in a Conference devoted to examining authority that the authority of the Director should always remain to some extent problematic.

The Director has to be available for the transference of the staff as well as of the membership. This offers evidence of the prevailing dynamic in the Conference institution as a whole; and more generally it yields insight into the collusive processes through which, for example, organisational hierarchies are sustained.

At the more overt level, the Director has responsibility, on behalf of the staff group, for overall boundary management – the external boundary, especially in relation to the hall of residence in which it is held; and internally, the boundaries between staff and membership and between sub-sets of staff. Management of practical matters on these boundaries is delegated to the Conference Administrator(s). The Director leads the work of staff in public, for example in plenary sessions, and in its own separate meetings. The Director also takes a consultant role, usually in the LSG.

Within the staff group there is a defined pattern of delegation to sub-sets of staff – for example, one with responsibility for the Small Study Group system, consisting of several SSGs, and another for the LSG. The individual consultant is conceived as deriving authority from the sub-set and as being accountable to it. This is discharged in meetings of, for instance, the SSG team, in which they are trying to identify common themes in, and perhaps an unconscious 'division of labour' among their respective groups, and also to explore the relatedness of the SSG system to the LSG system and the other configurations in the Conference. Examination of mutual projections between these sub-sets is an important, and often difficult, task of frequent full staff meetings.

The accompanying figure illustrates the systemic framework within which the staff consultant is working. This figure represents a Small Study Group. Transactions among the individual members, **m** – **m**, are to be understood in terms of the relatedness of the member group and consultant, **M** – **C**. That in turn implies some image or fantasy of the system as a whole that includes both **M** and **C** and of its relation to its environments, including the SSG system and the wider Conference. In the LSG, **C** may be 2-4 consultants. (The same basic model can be extended to the more complex situation in which **m** is a sub-group of members, **M** the total membership group, and **C** the staff of the Conference.) A consultant's interpretation is essentially a working hypothesis about this set of systemic relations, drawing on his/her observations and internal feelings. To take a simple example:- When in a SSG a silen member is being picked on by others, the consultant may feel and say that the attack is really on him for not contributing what the members want from him; and further that the attack is displaced because there is anxiety that if it were directed to the consultant it would be so violent as to destroy him and throw the group into anarchy; and beyond that again, that the samell group has to be kept safe because the wider system – the Conference at large – is felt to be evil and indiscriminately destructive. Ideally, therefore the working hypothesis contains a "because clause" immediately: (s)he may have to make two or three intervening observations first. Always, however, the consultant is trying to use her/his experience of being pushed into this role or that in order to work at the task of the group – the study of its own behaviour, as a group, in the here and now. Comments on individual behaviour and dynamics are avoided. "Personality variables", in the words of a typical brochure, "are for private consideration by the individual member." The consultant will, however, appropriately draw attention to processes in which the group is casting an individual member in a role – as fight –leader, clown or non-speaker, for example – to serve its collective needs.

Figure: The relationship of the consultant to the group

m = individual member
M = member group
C = consultant

(Reproduced from Miller [1977] with the permission of Macmillan Press Ltd)

In taking up this interpretive role, the consultant is operating at the boundary of the system, trying to understand what is happening between the parts and the whole, and between the whole and its environment. One hopes that at times members will learn to take up this boundary perspective themselves. It is partly for this reason that the role of observer to the Small Study Groups has been abandoned: it offers the members an alternative and inappropriate role-model, through which to escape from the work rather than engage with it. Moreover, it distorts, deflects or dilutes the transference onto the consultant, to whom some processes then become less accessible. These factors outweigh the possible advantages of giving the consultant another perspective in post-sessional discussions and also of providing a niche for a trainee. Analogously to the training of psychoanalysts, it now seems more appropriate to provide the novice SSG consultant with supervision after the session. Peer discussions within the sub-set of consultants are a further learning opportunity.

Two other points may be made about consultant behaviour in experiential groups which sometimes causes puzzlement. First, (s)he enters and leaves the group territory strictly according to the timetable.

This predictability offers a form of security; it defines the time available and leaves the members with their authority to decide how to use it; and it enables the consultant to interpret the way they use it. Second, the contributions of the consultant are always so far as possible directed to the task: thus conventional social rituals, such as 'good mornings', which are not task-related, are eschewed.

In the Review and Application Groups, which have a different task, the role of the consultant is correspondingly different: it tends to be less interpretive and more facilitative, and is occasionally even didactic, in that the consultant may offer conceptual frameworks to help members understand processes they have experienced. Recognition that change of role is accompanied by change in behaviour is itself an enlightenment to some members.

Theory and Phenomenology

Conference members commonly have the fantasy that they are guinea-pigs being experimented upon by a staff whose primary interest is in research and the advancement of knowledge. Such a fantasy is understandable. In the social science literature there is an abundance of papers and books on group processes based on therapy and training groups whose members have knowingly or unknowingly been the objects of observation and experimentation, and some of these studies have indeed been illuminating. Moreover, the Tavistock Institute is known to be in the research business. Beyond that, in the Conference itself, staff are aspiring to use a version of the scientific method in the here and now: they are putting forward working hypotheses with evidence from their observations and internal feelings, and are inviting members to use their own evidence to verify or falsify the hypotheses. If, as they often do, members find their experiential learning difficult and painful, it is not surprising that they should take the paranoid view that they are victims of staff's experiments.

The fact is that there has been a rigorous adherence to the primary task of "providing opportunities to learn" and an avoidance of muddying this by pursuing a research agenda. During the 1960s, Pierre Turquet, with the participant's permission, recorded study group sessions in two or three advanced training groups. With that exception, he and others who have worked to distil something from their groups have had to rely on making notes between sessions.

Within the conferences, the place of theory is properly problematic. Until the mid-1969s, lecture sessions were an integral part of the conference design. With some early exceptions, the lecturers were members of staff who also had consulting roles in the experiential events. Their subjects included theories of individual, group and organisation and also the application of theories to practical problems in the lecturers' own experience. According to Rice, the lecturers were "designed to give intellectual content to the learning taking place in other events of the conference," and "to provide a framework for articulation of the experience of the conference" (1965: 35). He went on to say: "The lecture series has, however, an important secondary task: to provide a traditional form of teaching within a learning situation that is using unfamiliar methods" (loc. cit.); and: "Members find lecturers reassuring, not only because they are familiar with the method but also because they have the opportunity to meet the staff in traditional academic roles: thus they have a kind of standard by which to judge the staff's performance in less familiar roles in other events. The lecturers, in other words, provide a familiar baseline for judgements about unfamiliar experiences" (pp. 126-127).

By the mid 1960s, that secondary task was becoming redundant. Rice's book itself helped to make it so. Either through reading or word of mouth, the majority of members knew roughly what to expect: that staff in experiential events would enter and leave the room on time, would not lead the discussion, would probably respond to a question by offering an interpretation, and so on. A more serious consideration was a sense that the theories and concepts were being used defensively. Such formulations as Bion's basic assumptions of dependence, fight-flight and pairing, or Tuckman's stages of group development (forming, storming, norming, performing) (Tuckman 1965), were tending to be used as labels for an experience – "Ah! Yes! This is 'basic assumption fight'" – as if that were the end of the matter. Labelling is defensive in that it inhibits puzzling over the actual experience, wondering how I got caught up in it, why at this time, and so on. It also simplifies what is invariably a much more complex set of processes: apperception of other elements, which may be more difficult and troublesome, is squeezed out. One further consideration that contributed to abandoning lectures was the fairly frequent experience that members' projections onto the lecturer belonged not to that session at all – they were carry-overs from a preceding

experiential event – but these could scarcely be worked with effectively from the lecturer role. Thus concepts are more appropriately introduced in the concluding application phase of the Conference, at a point at which they may help members to relate specific experiences to their external roles. Although Conference brochures include a reading list, those participants who use it at all generally find that it is after the Conference, when they can reflect on links with their own experience, that they gain most from the written word.

Most staff have also learned to be cautious about carrying too much conceptual baggage into their consultant roles. Gosling, in "A Study of Very Small Groups" (1981) has made this point eloquently. The 'Small' Study Groups prevalent in these conferences generally have 10-12 members; but in their organisational settings outside, many members work in groups of five or six; and so in some conferences from 1976 onwards the Very Small Study Group (VSSG) has been available as a separate event. Gosling, drawing on his own and colleagues' experience in consulting to VSSGs in 1976 and 1977, developed an interesting account of the phenomenology of this size of group. He listed various characteristics of the psychological field of the VSSG that distinguished it from the SSG, and went on to say: "in attempting to give meaning to these experiences various psychological models are offered using memories of analogous experiences of the past" (p 651). He found he could identify "only four clusters of past experience from which psychological models appear to be drawn" (p 642). These were: The Confessional (the search for intimacy), The Family, Negotiation, and – tentatively – The Balloon or Lifeboat ("a balloon in which someone has got to be jettisoned and who is it going to be?") (loc.cit.). Gosling then drops a bombshell on his readers by telling us of a third experience of consulting to a VSSG – still within a Leicester Conference, but this time for members of a Training Group – in which the processes are quite different: "what I thought I had learned so far seemed to have only the vaguest relevance" (p644). He concludes:

> "This experience left me with two vivid realisations:
>
> 1. How much the events I was trying to get to grips with were defined, predicated or determined by their social context and therefore how empty of meaning it was to refer to VSGs, SGs or LGs as if they were reproducible objects or event that there was such an identifiable category as to what I have heard referred to as 'conference learning.' The initials VSG refer to events that have a certain amount in common, such as number of participants and the fact that they take place in a tradition of exploration called the Leicester Conference, but that are profoundly influence by what is going on round them in time and place. So much is this the case that any generalisation about VSGs that can fairly be made is likely to be so modest as to be of very little use or interest.
>
> 2. How quickly a formulation, a concept or a theory loses its enabling quality and becomes a barrier to the possibility of making further observations. An experience of a VSG is deepened or led on to a further and new experience only at the moment that a theory about it is being fashioned. The theory may then lie around for a while to be applied occasionally and enjoyed in a way that is neither productive nor harmful. Sooner or later, however, it because a barrier to new experiences, a Procrustean bed and a downright blight. Perhaps the most that can be hoped for is that this cycle of degeneration, if there is one, is accomplished in as short a time as possible (pp 644-5).#

Finally, Gosling links this to his experience as an analyst of seeming constantly to forget and to have to rediscover anew the theory of the Oedipus Complex, as if it must lie "just on the boundary of what I must repress and what I must acknowledge. The instability of what is known, or thought to be known, seems to be required if its it to be rediscovered repeatedly always in a new context and so always for the first time … It is as if learning always has to take place on the edge of exasperation …" (P 645).

Lawrence makes a related point in discussing the dangers of the institutionalization of the conferences:

> "new transformations which might lead to a deeper ignorance and then a more profound understanding of groups are constrained. As Establishments have grown to perpetuate the work of Bion, the world of groups have their psychotic phenomena is in danger of being defined

forever. The possibility of suggestion that might lead to tentative new insights can be squeezed out" (1985: 310).

My own experience is congruent with that. Having directed very many Leicester and other conferences over the past twenty years, I am highly conscious of the pressures, internal and external, towards becoming an 'institutionalised' Director. The symptom is loss of capacity to be surprised – the sense of having been here before and knowing what to do next. I know, yet repeatedly have to relearn, that this is precisely what the staff and membership want of me: to provide such containment that they too can avoid surprise. Perversely but properly, members seem to learn more from the inexperienced consultant, who is constantly confronted with the unfamiliar and lacks a comforting repertoire of tried and tested responses. Thus I have to work hard to become 'inexperienced' – to lower my defences against recognizing that I have never before been with **these** people in **this** setting at **this** moment. To give a trivial example, I rarely note down emerging ideas: I am aware that yesterday's jottings may structure and blinker what I see today.

Theoretical formulations, if they are to be further rather than inhibit experiential learning, probably have to be held at a very general or abstract level. Thus, as we have seen, Bion's identification of three specific basic assumption groups readily leads to labeling. What remains useful, in the context of the conference work, is the notion of basic assumption functioning in groups and, lying behind that, his proposition that the basic assumptions are to be regarded as secondary formations that defend against primitive psychotic anxieties – related, for example, to "an extremely early primal scene worked out on a level of part objects" (Bion 1961: 164).

This makes it clearer that to label a basic assumption is simply to label a defence; whereas by shifting our attention back to the underlying level we are at least potentially open to uncovering the primitive phantasies that, at a given moment, the shared defence is being mobilized to repress.

Jaques, drawing on Klein and building on Bion, offered the equivalently usefully theory of larger social systems as providing defences against persecutory and depressive anxiety (Jaques 1955); and Menzies (1960) was then able to identify the more specific anxieties and associated defences in nursing. It is, of course, by removing the familiar structures and conventions – or, to be more precise, by reducing them to the differentiation of two roles, member and consultant – that the Conference setting makes the defences and underlying anxieties more accessible.

Rice (1969) offered a similarly useful perspective for the examination of inter-group relations. His basic propositions were:

> "1.   The effectiveness of every inter-group relationship is determined, so far as its overall purposes are concerned, by the extent to which the groups involved have to defend themselves against uncertainty about the integrity of their boundaries.
>
> 2.   Every relationship – between individuals, within small groups and within large   groups as well as between groups – has the characteristics of an inter-group relationship. A corollary to the first proposition is that the making of any inter-group relationship carries with it the possibility of a breakdown in authority, the threat of chaos and the fear of disaster" (Rice 1969: 565-566).

In the same paper, Rice drew attention to limitations in Bion's formulation of basic assumptions, in that they describe only "special cases which are most easily observable in small groups because they are large enough to give power to an alternative leadership" (ie leadership of a basic assumption group in competition with work group leadership) "and yet not so large as to provide support for more than one kind of powerful alternative leadership at any one time" (p578). Using (and perhaps overstretching) the concept of 'sentience' (Miller & Rice 1967), he went on to postulate:

> "In general, the larger the number of members of a group there are, the more members there   are to find an outlet for their non-task related sentience, and hence the more   powerful
can be   its expression, and the more support can an alternative leader obtain. Equally, because of the

large number, the more futile and useless can group behaviour appear when there is no sentient unanimity among the membership either in support of, or in opposition to, group task performance.   In other words, the larger the group the more opportunities members have to divest themselves of their unwanted or irrelevant sentience, by projecting it into so many others" (p 579).

It is to Turquet (1975) that we are indebted for a further conceptualization of large group processes, again at a level that encourages rather than constrains the exploration of what is happening in a particular group. In the words of its subtitle, his paper is "a study in the phenomenology of the individual's experiences of changing membership in a large group." It draws entirely on his own experience as one of 2-4 consultants in LSGs of 40-80 members at Leicester and allied conferences.

He points out that the consultant is present in a dual capacity, both in a defined role and as a person. This is, of course, also the case with the consultant in the small group. A common question is:- Is the consultant part of the group or not? The answer is 'both': as a person, inescapably yes; in the role of consultant, no. To be caught in one capacity at the expense of the other is to lose the ability to work. But the forces in the large group are more powerful; the role of consultant may be lost for longer periods. "He too will find himself alone, an isolate; he too will lose his wits, be de-skilled, filled up, threatened with annihilation – to mention but a few of the many common personal experiences provided by the large group …   As a consultant, I too … am involved in a process, a conversion process whose aim is to make me something other …   The struggle to resist them, to remain a consultant, is great. In the harsh terms of large-group life, it is a case of who will dominate whom …" (1975: 91-2).

Turquet offers a terminology for the various forms of relatedness of the member to the large group, including non-relationship as one form of relatedness. The conference member comes into such a setting as an 'I'. 'I' refers to "the person who has not yet achieved a role status in the large group, or to a person who has momentarily left such a status for whatever reason, possibly in order to search within himself for a model or a skill; a member in transition" (p 316). Turquet suggests that at this entry stage such a person should be thought of as a 'singleton', "not yet part of a group but attempting both to find himself and to make relations with other singletons who are in a similar state" (p94). Next he considers the position of the singleton who has established a relationship, with other singletons, with the large group as a whole. The term he uses for such a 'converted' singleton is 'individual member' (IM). It is a move from a non-role to a role. Searching for an equilibrium in the flux of the large group and its characteristic threat of annihilation, the singleton experiences the constant attempts to convert him/her from an IM into a 'membership individual' (MI) – a creature of the group. Turquet goes on to identify the transitional state, "as the individual member in his group life moves between the various stages …: singleton to IM, IM to MI, or MI back to singleton (p96). At these phases there is at least potentially an opportunity for choice, which is the occasion for expression of individuality, of 'I-ness'. Reassertion of 'I-ness' may involve a sudden upsurge of idiosyncratic behaviour. But (Turquet implies) this may expose the person to conversion again into an MI. For the singleton to become and remain an IM he needs to find 'a boundary or skin which both limits and defines him" (loc.cit.). Externally he needs the presence of others in order to define 'me' and 'not me'; and internally a sense of boundary between past and present, then and now. Without this, he is consigned back into the "undifferentiated non-singleton matrix" out of which he had developed (p97). The experience is one of continual disorientation. On the one hand are powerful pressures towards homogenization, towards the lowers common denominator. This, as Anzieu (1971) has indicated, can be a beguiling world, which gets rid of sexual difference and castration anxiety and may feed the phantasy that the group itself is an all-gratifying mother, perhaps the mother of the infant in the womb. But it is also a destroyer of identity. On the other hand, assertion of individuality lays one open to exploitation and to attacks from unknown sources. Or one may be left to fall into an infinite void. So it is a fearful place, the more so because one does not know what is happening to one's projections or from where and in what form they will come back. There is an experience of being fractionated into multiple parts. Moreover,

> "the introjected vastness of [one's] external world meets a similar internal experience [ie of an internal world that is unencompassable and boundless] and by their mutual reinforcement the level of anxiety is raised, requiring a further projection into the outer   large group of the now

reinforced sense of vastness, only to increase the fantasied percept of the large group as now greater than ever before, not only vast but endless" (p118).

Turquet also explores the large group's potential for violence – an unpredictable, errant violence, never far below the surface – along with the fears that this evokes and examples of the defences that are mobilized. So Turquet's paper is a powerful contribution, which succeeds in communicating and beginning to conceptualise the struggle between individuation and incorporation, while at the same time conveying the boundlessness of the territory that is available to be explored in the here and now. Arising out of the group relations conferences, very many papers have been written, and some offer valuable descriptions and conceptualizations which contribute to social science; but relatively few have the quality of enhancing the conference work itself by lowering the barriers to seeing and hearing what is happening in ourselves and among those around us.

The Role of Member and Nature of Learning

There are no specific qualifications for membership. Undeniably, some members find the Conference stressful, and people going through emotional turmoil in their personal lives are probably not in the best state t make use of an intensive educational programme; but the decision has to be theirs: our assumption has to be that, as managers and professionals with responsibility for the well-being of others., they must be capable of making such a decision. Sometimes we receive enquiries from organisations about whether to send a particular manager to the Conference – perhaps someone with relationship difficulties. Our response is that we do not provide treatment for such difficulties – this is an educational, not a remedial institution – and we also recommend against **sending** anyone: learning is much more likely if the individual exercises his/her own authority to apply. The fee structure itself encourages two or more members from the same organisation to attend together: experience shows that they are more likely to apply their learning effectively when they go back.

In the Conference opening, the Director may typically say: "Staff are not here to teach in the conventional sense but to provide opportunities to learn. What you learn and the pace at which you learn are up to you." There is a starting assumption that application to become a member implies some preparedness to engage in the task of the Conference. Beyond that, the role of member is not defined. There is no compulsion to attend sessions on time, or at all. Taking up a membership role is left to the individual's authority.

The experience of being a member is nevertheless initially disconcerting. The task of 'here-and-now' study is unfamiliar and elusive; experience in other roles seems of little help; and so members feel de-skilled. They see themselves as acting as individuals, yet the consultants persist in interpreting their behaviour as a function of the group as a whole (Miller 1980). Whereas the individual is clear that s/he intended this, or did not intend that, the consultant seems perversely to focus instead on effects and consequences, and from these infers unconscious intentions at the level of the group. So quite basic, taken-for-granted assumptions about one's identity, one's sense of self, are being called into question; the boundary between self and other, which had seemed obvious, suddenly becomes problematic.

By the end of the second day most members have 'joined', in the sense of being caught up in the process, and a conference culture has begun to emerge. For example, almost all are strictly observing the time boundaries of sessions, and the consultant role has become less alien. At the end of the first week there is a 36-hour break, during which most members leave Leicester for at least part of the time. 'Ordinary life' – life outside the Conference – is often felt to be disorienting, particularly for members going back to their families. They have become much more involved than they had realized. Before the break there is anxiety: will others come back, will the consultant come back? Commitment is tested. The second week tests what members thought they had learned in the first: it is a form of application. "I've learned not to get caught like that again" – and then getting caught in just the same way; or carefully avoiding one landmine, only to tread on another. There are also of course the more positive experiences: for example, learning about group organization and representation from the Inter-Group Event may prove useful in the Institutional Event which begins after the break. Then, as they come to the final sessions of SSG and LSG, and to the closing plenaries, staff and members are working at the processes of ending. This means sorting out some of the projections of the past two weeks and re-drawing the boundary around oneself. Application sessions help in this by re-alerting members to their external roles.

Redrawing that personal boundary is seldom easy. Members talk of having to take away more baggage than they brought: there are awkwardly shaped lumps of undigested experience, only some of which will have been processed in Application Groups. Many have at some stage found themselves implicated in unconscious dynamics that seem strange, even bizarre, yet are not easily explained away. For example, in the IG and IE, when members form themselves into groups, often one of these begins to behave as a quasi-staff group; and it is not at all uncommon to discover that the configuration of such a group is identical to the staff group, both in overall size and in gender and ethnic distribution. Or a set of members may erupt with violent feelings against some victim or imagined enemy and then subsequently realize that they had been behaving quite irrationally and mindlessly; but complex feelings of guilt and anger may remain.

This brings me to the nature of learning and what may be learned. Gosling, in the passage quoted earlier, is properly skeptical of an identifiable 'Conference learning'. 'Group Relations **Training**' is a misnomer. 'Training' implies transmission of skills, acquisition of which should, potentially at least, be measurable. The Conference provides a set of experiences, but also explicitly states that authority for making use of the experiences and learning from them rests firmly with the individual member. Outcomes are therefore idiosyncratic and unpredictable. We can say only that the nature of interpretation, the structure of the Conference and the intensity of the "social island2 combine to call into question existing assumptions and to generate new insights.

Twenty years ago Rice and I devised a complex methodology for evaluation (Rice 1965). Because of the assumed synergism of the conference processes, and also because we were wary of the effects of intermingling research and educational tasks, we deferred any attempt to identify the impact of specific conference events. For the first phase we proposed a 'before-and-after' set of in-depth clinical interviews combined with assessments by colleagues in members' working-settings. It was a costly scheme, and we were never able to secure funding for it. We therefore remain reliant on impressionistic and anecdotal evidence, from past members, from people who know them, and from our own observations.

It seems that three different kinds or levels of learning are likely to occur. At the simplest level, members learn to identify and label some of the unfamiliar phenomena that they encounter, but they do so as observers. A second kind goes beyond observation to insight, though it is also partly conceptual: the experience adds to the ways in which the individual classifies the world and relates to it – particularly involvement in unconscious processes. There is an awareness of phenomena previously unnoticed or dismissed as irrelevant. Members often speak of Conference learning as giving them another perspective on human behaviour , including their own, and that is often what they mean. They may, however, be referring to a third kind of learning, which implies not an **additional** perspective but a **different** perspective. There is a correspondence here to the three levels of learning postulated by Bateson (1973). Palmer (1979) draws on Bateson in an important paper on "Learning and the Group Experience2. This third level, as he elegantly puts it, "entails discovering a capacity to doubt the validity of it, "entails discovering a capacity to doubt the validity of perceptions which seem unquestionably true." He goes on to say:

> "This is something different from merely replacing one apperceptive habit by another, as might be the objective of behaviour therapy … It is also something different from being knowledgeable about one's own character, in the manner of those who justify   their behaviour with statements like: 'Well, you see, I am a very dependent (obsessional, paranoid, untidy) person.' The experience of Learning III is the experience of becoming responsible for one's dependence (obsessiveness, paranoia, untidiness) as something one is, and is doing" (Palmer: 173).

These distinctions are important, but difficult to operationalise. 'Learning III' implies some degree of personality re-structuring – a systemic change – of a kind which would be fully in line with the aims of the Conference; but how likely is this to happen within the two-week span? And how to measure it?

In the absence of systemic research, I offer the following tentative conclusions:-

a)   'Level II' learning – the additional perspective – is a fairly common and obviously desirable outcome. Although the groundwork for it is laid by the Conference, it becomes established only in the ensuing months – notably when a member identifies a process that is dynamically similar to one in which he was involved in the Conference. Or, at that moment, he may, without realising it, respond in a way different from a familiar pre-conference response.

b)   Learning is reinforced if the member is returning to an organisation where others already share that perspective. Menninger (1972, 1985) gives an account of an attempt in one organisation to bring about a significant cultural change by encouraging a substantial number – a critical mass – of its professional and administrative staff to attend Leicester Conferences and others based on a similar model. The second paper follows up the experiment after some 10 years. Most participants were strongly positive: they reported both professional and personal benefits. Menninger also assessed the impact on the organisation as largely positive, though he identified some difficulties – a point to which I shall return.

c)   Level II learning is a necessary but not sufficient condition for level III, which may be even more desirable, but is less common and more elusive. It is often, though by no means always, expressed in significant changes in the individual's work and personal life: for example, a career move, a job change, a change of partner. (Such moves, of course, are not in themselves to be taken as positive indicators: they may also be symptoms of avoiding confrontations that a Level III change might require.)

d)   Statements made by members at the end of the Conference are a poor guide to outcome. Scepticism tends to be a more positive indicator than enthusiasm or euphoria.

Any account of members' experience and learning must also address the issue of casualties. There is a persistent myth that Leicester Conferences produce psychiatric casualties; and I use the term 'myth' advisedly. Certainly, in the course of a Conference many individuals feel disturbed at times, and some may exhibit seemingly bizarre behaviour. At a psychological level one might interpret this as an internal struggle between incorporating and rejecting unwelcome insights. However, that is not the level at which we are working.

Sociologically, the Conference is an "abnormal" institution: that is to say, it is one in which some of the customary norms of institutional life no longer apply. Membership is, as we have seen, at least initially a disorienting experience. "Normal" behaviour may indeed be aberrant in the realities of an "abnormal" institution; and correspondingly behaviour that would be classed as deviant in other settings is to be expected. However, so far as I can discover, only three members have been admitted to hospital as psychiatric patientis during or immediately following a Conference. One was in the early 1960s. The second was a member who became disturbed during the mid-conference break and was taken to hospital by 'helpful' colleagues: we had some difficulty in getting him released for the final plenary sessions. In the most recent case the member discharged herself within three days and was fully competent during the rest of the conference. So the actual incidence of serious breakdown is extraordinarily low – of the order of 0.1 percent. The myth nevertheless persists, evidently in order to 'prove' how dangerous the experience – which means: "How clever I am to survive it." Members of the so-called helping professions have an interest in producing casualties: by becoming care-givers, they can escape the de-skilling of the membership role and reaffirm themselves in their professional roles. Beyond that one may wonder whether the thrust to identify and extrude a casualty is a collective and collusive process whereby the victim is the recipient of displaced wishes to destroy the Conference, and more explicitly the Director, who embodies it. But the consequences of implementing that phantasy are too terrifying; hence the victim is destroyed so that the Director can be preserved. The staff response therefore is to focus not on the individual but on the group dynamic: our working hypothesis is that any increase in the individual's disturbance is a product of projections from the group – which is adept at spotting and exploiting the vulnerable member. Rigorous interpretation at the group level will almost invariably undo the projections. In the case of the member who discharged herself, one cannot help wondering how far she was enabled to do so by the persistent interpretation by staff during her absence of the complicity of the total

Conference – staff and members – to isolate disturbance in her: through redistribution of disturbance a space was created to which she could return. But the pressures to regard the disturbed individual as a patient remain very seductive.

In almost every Conference there is a tiny handful of members who are untouched by the experience. Occasionally, a member will leave, saying "This is not for me". A few go away with indigestible 'lumps' of experience, which they cannot process. As indicated earlier, we have no way of identifying such people in advance. If some people are too defended to learn, all we can do is to respect their defences. Authority remains with the member.

DISSEMINATION AND APPLICATION

Institutional Reproduction

This is a process that began in 1963; and indeed I take this heading from Rice (1965). During the 1960s and early 1970s in particular, that national and international demand for the Leicester model of group relations training was such that there were pressures to devote more and more time to conference work. However, the staff of TIHR who have been involved in the Leicester Conferences over the years have never wanted to be exclusively or even mainly in the business of running training activities. Indeed, continuing experience as practitioners has been seen as a necessary condition for effectiveness in conference work. The TIHR response, therefore, was to encourage and help other institutions in Britain and abroad to acquire their own capabilities to sponsor and staff events based on the Leicester approach.

The earliest examples of the 1960s were, in England, the Grubb Institute (formerly Christian Teamwork) and, in the United States, the Washington School of Psychiatry (initially in association with the Yale University School of Medicine). In both case, the TIHR co-sponsored a series of "£Leicester-type2 conferences, initially providing the conference director and most staff, until the institutions were equipped with a large enough pool of trained staff to run the events themselves. By this time the staff "provided" were by no means exclusively drawn from the Tavistock Institute and Clinic , or from the other initial sponsoring institution, the University of Leicester. Initiation of the Advanced Training Group at Leicester Conferences from 1962 onwards made it possible to develop a broader pool of trained staff from, inter alia, education, industry and the prison and probation services. Some of these were then deployable on the new conferences. Reciprocally, staff of the new institutions enlarged the pool that could be drawn upon for Leicester in a process that still continues.

Subsequently, there has been similar collaboration in other countries, including France (with the International Foundation for Social Innovation – IFSI), India (the Indian institute of Management, Calcutta) and more recently Israel. One interesting feature of the French development is that the conferences were established as bi-lingual – French and English – from the beginning. Either language is used by members and staff indiscriminately. Although many members and some staff are essentially monolingual, with very limited comprehension of the other language, this does not appear to be a significant handicap to their understanding of the dynamics; and indeed (as I can confirm from my own experience on the staff of a Finnish conference) ignorance of the words may heighten one's attention to the 'music'. The French conferences attract an international membership.

Meanwhile the American conference institution, which, after Rice died in 1969, was separately incorporated in the following year as the A K Rice Institute (AKRI), has not only developed a set of regional affiliates, straddling the country, each of which runs conferences based on the Leicester model, but has itself engaged in a similar institution-building process in Sweden. There, the earlier conferences that used imported staff were in English; then, as the local institution, AGSLO, became self-sufficient, the conference language shifted to Swedish. Conferences have also been run in other countries without (so far) the subsequent development of a viable local institution. Examples include: TIHR and the Grubb Institute in Ireland; the Grubb Institute in Italy, and AKRI in Iceland. In yet other countries, local groups have taken the initiative to develop their own capability to run conferences. Finland and Germany are well established examples. The catchment area of the German institution (MundO) includes Austria and Switzerland as well as West Germany. There are recently formed or incipient institutions in Norway, Denmark and Mexico.

All those just mentioned identify themselves both as implementing a versiot of the 'Leicester model' and as drawing directly on the resources and advice either of the GRTP in TIHR or of one of the established sister institutions. In addition, there are some institutions, such as the Australian Institute of Social Analysis, which are developing their own distinctive approaches to training, based partly on the 'Leicester model'.

What has occurred in a partly unplanned way is a consensual process of accreditation, initially by TIHR alone and then increasingly through peer relationships not only with TIHR but also among

other institutions. Interchanges of staff have been crucial to this process. There are nevertheless a few bodies, in the United States and elsewhere, which offer events described as using the "Tavistock model2, but which in some cases use staff with minimum direct experience of the conferences and which remain outside this informal mechanism of reciprocal 'quality control'.

Finally I come back to the British scene. Here there have been collaborative relationships with several institutions besides the Grubb Institute, but these have ended with the departure or death of key personnel. Examples include the Bristol University School of Education, Manchester Business School and the Chelmsford Cathedral Centre for Research and Training.

Still nearer home, the close collaboration in this work between the Tavistock Clinic and Institute has persisted, even though as institutions they have been separate for 40 years. Jock Sutherland, the first post-war Medical Director of the Clinic, made a major input into the early conferences, from 1957 onwards. (After he retired, he set up the Scottish Institute for Human Relations, which also organized conferences, some in association with TIHR.) His successor in the role (re-designated Chairman of the Professional Committee), Robert Gosling, was actively involved throughout the 1960s and 1970s, until he too retired. The Clinic's own annual non-residential conference, for students and staff, is based on the Leicester model, and this has swollen the numbers of Clinic professionals equipped for conference staff roles. The current Chairman, Anton Obholzer, continues the tradition. Recent Leicester Conferences have been co-sponsored by the Tavistock Clinic Foundation and he has directed two of them.

Adaptation
Within the series of Leicester Conferences themselves various different designs have been developed. New events have been added to the repertoire. If the VSG represents the size of many working teams the Median Group of 15-40 reflects the problems of many committees and councils in oscillating between the dynamics of the small and large groups. The Praxis Event, introduced by Lawrence (Miller 1980, Lawrence 1985), removes a further layer of structure. During it , the Administrator manages the outer boundary of the conference while the Director and all the other staff relinquish their managerial and consultant roles, thus dissolving the internal member/staff boundary. Left with only a set of individuals and a negotiated primary task (which is basically to study what is happening while it happens), one is confronted with both the creative opportunities and the self-imposed constraints in using the freedoms.

The set of events used in any one Conference may be programmed in different permutations. For example, although the Small Study Group (SSG) has always had an important place, in some designs the Large Study Group (LSG) has been given priority both as the first session every day and in the overall number of sessions. (This tends to produce some differences in dynamics: typically, more sustained development of myth and metaphor in the LSG and more concern with individualism in the SSG.) However, the study of authority has remained the central focus and task.

Throughout these 30 years, the Leicester Conference has kept its two-week span and been fully residential; but besides this the Leicester model has been translated into various configurations. An extended non-residential course was introduced in the 1960s. It included all the events of the regular conferences but held on one evening a week over six months. Rice's evaluation was equivocal; but a critical drawback was the impossibility of drawing a boundary around the membership and staff in such a way as to create the equivalent of the Conference institution "with properties of its own that would provide opportunities for learning" (Rice 1965: 182). The fully-fledged course was replaced by a simple series of, usually, 10 sessions of weekly study groups; these continue, though currently with a shift of focus away from intra-group processes as such, and, instead, on the relatedness of these processes to society outside.

Collaboration with other institutions led to introduction of shorter forms of the model – usually 55-7 days, though weekend events offer a useful introduction. Even if non-residential, these can be sufficiently intensive for the 'conference as an institution' to be experienced. In the United States AKRI offered an annual two-week conference for 10 years of so, but recruitment of membership became difficult; so only Leicester has retained the fortnight.

The basic model nevertheless lends itself to exploration of other themes, which have been the focus of many shorter conferences, from a weekend to a week, residential and non-residential. Inter-group weekends were an early example – though that implied little more than pulling out one event from the Leicester design. In the early 1970s, "men and women in working relationships" became the theme for a number of conferences, first in the States (Gould 1979) and then in Britain. Other themes on which the GRTP has been running shorter conferences have included "creativity and destructiveness", "interdependence and conflict" and "autonomy and conformity". In these the main events have been the LSG and the Praxis Event.

In addition, of course, a great variety of training programmes for managers and professionals have included experiential events, such as the SSG, along with more conventional teaching methods.

Application

Organisational Interventions

Over the years also TIHR has run conferences on the Leicester model for client bodies. One technical difficulty is the strength of the shared organisational boundary around the membership, which becomes a defence against formation of a boundary around the conference institution. The difficulty is somewhat reduced in, for example, a large multi-national company where many members will not know one another, and the purpose of the conference is clearly educational. Much more problematic are requests to run a Leicester-model conference for a set of people who work together – perhaps for all the staff of a clinic or for the managerial and supervisory staff of a department of a company. Implicitly, if not explicitly, the prospective client system is hoping that this will unlock relationship difficulties and catalyse change. In my judgment the one-off conference can be more damaging than construction and should be undertaken only as part of a longer-term intervention within which the consultant(s) can take continuing professional responsibility to help the client work through the outcomes.

One such Tavistock intervention was with the US Dependents Schools (European Area), which provide education for children of American servicemen posted overseas. In this case senior staff from all the schools were brought together initially for an intensive five-day experiential event, which included some training on mutual consultation. This was followed by a six-month application phase during which regional groups met regularly to support each other in using the conference experience to analyse and tackle problems in their own schools. Conference consultants were available for some of these sessions. The intervention concluded with another three-day residential conference, which combined some additional experiential sessions with more practical review and forward planning.

Although this was generally seen as a productive experience, this type of "in-house" intervention, like the one-off conference, carries an inherent tension: who is the client? In the regular Leicester Conference, the 'client' is assumed to be the individual member. Even though the fee may be paid by an employing organisation, it is the member who applies, presumptively on his/her own authority, and correspondingly it is for the member, not for the Conference sponsors, to manage his/her accountability to the employer. How to report back is a common issue in Application Groups towards the end of the Conference. In organisational interventions of the kind just described there are two clients: the organisation **and** the individual participant. The tension arises from the fact that the Leicester Conference approach ins inherently subversive, in that it is encouraging members to question the nature of authority and hence the ways in which they manage their role relationships to superiors, colleagues and subordinates in their own organisations. But in an organisational application the organisation, through its management, is also a client. Even though we may demand that membership should be voluntary, in reality individuals may feel under pressure to attend. Managers wanting to be 'equal' to subordinates as participants within the conference will be under pressure to mobilize their external managerial roles. The the extent that they feel that the conference experience is a threat to their external authority, they are liable to be set up by the rest of the membership to lead an attack on the conference staff; and so the boundary between membership roles and eternal roles becomes blurred. In such settings it is a continuing technical problem for consulting staff to work at this inherent ambiguity and tension of the dual clients.

Another example was a seriously under-performing manufacturing company with just under 1000 employees, which was part of a large international group (see Miller 1977, Khaleelee & Miller 1985). It operated on two sites: one, near London, included the main factory and the head office; the other, in the Midlands – 100 miles away – contained a much smaller plant. This was the result of amalgamating two businesses, which had previously been competitors. As so often happens in such mergers, the accountants expected the combined output and market share to equal the sum of the parts – an expectation seldom fulfilled. In this case, what was now the main factory had belonged to a company that the group had purchased, while the Midlands factory was the residue of the group's own former subsidiary that made a similar product. Moreover the sales force had been removed from the acquired company. And there had been other disruptive changes.

The intervention began with a diagnostic survey of all employees. This revealed acute splits cutting across one another: between management and workers; between employees from the two previous enterprises; and between departments. Identification with the organisation as a while was notably absent. Boundaries had been fractured and partly disintegrated; employees had fallen back onto their individual boundaries in a culture of survival.

The consultant team – two internal consultants with one from TIHR – postulated that the fragmented boundaries needed to be reconstructed, and designed what came to be called the 'People Programme'. Its main feature was an extended version of a Leicester Conference for 120 managers, supervisors and specialists, with weekly small study groups, weekend inter-group events and finally weekly large groups – all of which exactly matched the need to work at the boundaries at three levels: the individual in role relationships; the department and other groupings in their inter-group relations; and the organisation as a while in relation to its environment. Meanwhile, consultancy was being provided to the top management group – which in this case was the primary client. A formal system of employee consultation was also set up.

Within a year, significant changes had occurred: the People Programme, instead of being run by the consultants, had been taken over by the participants; the training was being extended to other employees; the large group was still meeting weekly (and continued for three years); task groups arose spontaneously to tackle pressing problems; inter-departmental co-ordination improved; the organisation gained a new sense of identity; and manufacturing performance and profits went up dramatically.

The consultants, who had already been providing consultancy on request to various internal groups, including a joint trade union body, then negotiated a new contract. This established them as a quasi-independent Consulting Resource Group (CRG) with its own budget, and made it explicit that the organisation as a whole – not management – was the client system. In addition to servicing internal groups, the CRG took on a new task, which was to try to elucidate the overall dynamics of the organisation. This involved experimenting to see whether the methodology of, say, the Large Study Group could be extended to a group of nearly 1,000, only a tiny proportion of whom could be present with the consultants at any one time. The common link was use of the transference. The CRG, like the group consultant in a Conference, was both outside the organisational boundary and also part of a wider client-consultant system, and hence available for projections from the organisation. The technique used was a weekly session – which anyone, manager or worker, was free to attend – in which the CRG members reviewed their experience during the week in consulting to parts of the organisation as a basis for formulating working hypotheses about the system as a whole. Evidence included their experience of being pulled in or pushed out, idealized or denigrated, homogenized or split, and so on, as well as observations of the pattern of projections among different groupings within the client system. Members of the organisation present at the meetings worked on these hypotheses and added their own preoccupations; and beyond that the consultants used the interpretations directly and indirectly in their work with various groups in the ensuing week. In these ways the voice of CRG was 'heard' by a significant proportion of the organisation and seemed to have some influence. "The most overt evidence was in the growing number of individuals able to perceive organisational processes in which they were implicated and able also to act on their understanding by taking greater personal authority in their ….. roles" (Khaleelee & Miller, 1985: 363-4).

"The operation was a success, but the patient died." What should have been foreseen was that the culture developing in this subsidiary company was increasingly divergent from that of the rest of the group. Exercise of "authority based on competence is always a threat to an organisaiton that defines authority as based on position": "if it is exercised by a subordinate it is treated by the superior as insubordination" (Miller 1986a 265). At group headquarters gratification over improved performance was submerged by anxiety about subversiveness; key managers were replaced; and the consultants were shown the door.

An Application at the Societal Level
This experiment encouraged a London-based group, in OPUS (an Organisation for Promoting Understanding in Society), to try to extend and adapt the methodology to the study of societal dynamics (OPUS 1980-1988, Khaleelee & Miller 1985, Miller 1986a).

As long ago as 1950 Bion – himself influenced by Freud's much earlier speculations – had been eager to do this and offered some provocative ideas. These included his well-known proposition that society hives off specialized work-groups to deal on its behalf with basic assumption emotions that would otherwise interfere with the functioning of society as a 'work group'. His examples were church (dependence), army (fight/flight) and, perhaps less convincingly, aristocracy (pairing) (Bion 1961). He had identified these phenomena in small groups; and Leicester Conference and other observations have amply confirmed that, although certain kinds of dynamics are characteristic of groups of different sizes (Turquet 1974), the larger group is always potentially present in the smaller, and at times the larger group phenomena break through. This, as we also found in the manufacturing company, can be used constructively. For example, the Leicester methodology has proved to be a useful tool in identifying organisational cultures: a small set of people from one organisation will display often unrecognized dimensions of their shared culture, in particular by mobilizing them as a defence against the primary task of the "here and now" study.

Moreover, as Rioch (1979) has suggested, conferences based on the Leicester model often mirror current societal phenomena. For example, she noted that the incidence of violent revolt – including, for instance, invasion of staff territory and kidnapping of individual staff – reached its peak in the American conferences in 1968-69; after that, it subsided, and attempts in the memberships to mobilize collective leadership were less successful. Parallel changes had been seen at Leicester. "The myth that the group is a creative matrix (was) progressively submerged by the countervailing myth that groups and institutions are dangerous and destructive." Correspondingly we saw "a withdrawal of commitment to groups, an increasing reluctance (noted also by Rioch) to use the conference setting for experiment and play (in the Winnicott sense), and a tendency for the individual to put up protective boundaries against group influences or seek security as an isolate or a pair" (Khaleelee & Miller, 1985: 368).

Deriving from this experience, OPUS explicitly set out to use the microcosm to reflect the macrocosm of society, and, indeed, to explore whether 'society' could be classed as an intelligible field of study in its own right, distinct from 'the large group'. Turquet had described the dual role of the consultant in the Conference large groups – the consultant and the person – and hence the struggle to hold a boundary position. But in 'society' there is no outside; hence no boundary role is available. OPUS has attempted to supply an institutional boundary within which its own members and others can examine their experience as 'citizens of society', and the capacity of this boundary to contain the chaotic and violent feelings evoked ahs been tested almost to destruction. The 'observing ego' has been precarious. However, it is confirmed that significant underlying themes can emerge in quite small groups that are given the task of examining their experience in their role as 'members of society'. Larger groups, of 30-40, may unconsciously enact, in vivid and painful ways, important societal processes. A recent example was an OPUS conference on Society and the Inner City, which belatedly realized that it had reproduced, by creating an isolated sub-group, the very phenomena that it was discussing (Miller 1986b).

REFLECTIONS

Why has the first Leicester Conference survived for 30 years – a period of considerable cultural change, nationally and internationally? Why has the Leicester model successfully taken root in so many other countries and cultures? China and Japan have not yet been penetrated, but there is evidence from India of effective use of the model with people drawn from poor rural communities. (For example, it has been regularly used by SAKTI, a Bangalore-based organisation promoting women in development.) So it is not just a preserve of professionals and managers who share a westernized cosmopolitan culture. Obversely, why has the model failed to diffuse more widely and more rapidly? Why are there not many more institutions running many more conferences every year? What has inhibited growth? Such questions are to be puzzled over. Here I offer only a few observations.

First, the model has proved effective in addressing an inherent feature of the human condition – the tension between individuation and incorporation – which in most 20th century cultures at least is a lifelong tension, never fully resolved. The model confronts us with that dilemma and with the precariousness of a notion of individuality and autonomy that we may have taken for granted. It does so, however, within a structure designed to relatively containing and within a conference culture whose values promote the idea – perhaps the hope – that through seeing how we get involved in unconscious group processes we can become less vulnerable to them and more effectively self-managing. Such discoveries are nearly always painful, in that they upset past assumptions and defences. The possibility of becoming more self-managing than you actually were is tainted by recognition that you were really much less self-managing than you thought you were. Nonetheless, most people seem to find that the outcome is, on balance, positive.

Second, there is the issue of what they do with the experience and the learning. Part of it, almost inevitably, is personal and private, relating to one's inner world. For some members it may remain so. But that is not the purpose of the Conference: the design is intended to promote the application of experience in their roles in that temporary institution to their roles in institutions outside.

Her I may make two comments. First, if it is effective, such application is inherently subversive. It involves calling into question the embedded assumptions and myths that support the status quo and exercising the authority of one's own competence in an organisational culture where formal authority commonly derives from hierarchy and status. If the member is returning to a position at or near the apex of the hierarchy, this is less of a problem, though one hopes such a person will have learned enough to prepare for the likely resistances. The less privileged ex-member may have to scale down her/his initial aspirations or risk being extruded. In any case, however, the fact that only the most enlightened organisation actively welcomes employees who question the status quo and exercises their own authority is certainly one limitation on expansion of the conferences.

A second common relates to inappropriate and superficial application, most commonly in the spirit of "do unto others what has just been done unto me." Despite verbal discouragements and repeated assertions that the Conference is designed for a specific educational task and that other tasks require other forms of organisation, we cannot prevent members from identifying with the role-models offered by staff and thus seeing to replicate them. This is one of Roy Menninger's reservations in his largely positive account of the experience of encouraging a critical mass of the staff of the Menninger Foundation to attend conferences (Menninger 1985). I quote extracts from his paper:

> "Potentially damaging to the therapeutic process was a tendency, during the immediate post-GRC (group relations conference) period to equate 'group process' with treatment. The powerful   effects of expressing primitive feelings and the instructive experience of group-induced s regression led to a natural but mistaken view that such experiences were the essence of therapy …, displacing the primary tasks of learning and understanding.

> "This perspective seemed to assume that the GRC was **model of treatment** rather than a **method   of education**. Group process is compelling and deeply involving, but it is not psychotherapy nor   is it a substitute for a dynamic understanding of the patient …

> "Coupled with this pattern was a tendency to use group process to 'manage' a patient's deviant or pathological behaviour … [and] diminished attention to the dynamic roots of the symptom …"

<div align="right">(Menninger 1985: 296-7)</div>

An additional question that Menninger might have raised is whether the focus on treatment was in part a displacement from confronting more painful or intractable issues in the organisation; were patients being mobilized to voice primitive feelings that staff were repressing?

It also has to be said that there is at least one recorded instance of the success in a psychiatric hospital of using a carefully thought out version of the conference model for the reconstitution of newly admitted grossly psychotic patients (Lofgren 1976). But overall, Menninger's strictures are soundly based. The reality is that the conference itself is an application – an application of a conceptual framework to an educational task. Many of the more significant applications to understanding of organisations, though informed by experience of conferences, essentially draw on that framework: studies of a school by Richardson (19730 and of a mental health centre by Levinson & Astrachan (1976) are two examples that come to mind. But all too often, as at the Menninger Foundation, members have come back from conferences with the fantasy that to 2run a group2 – or, indeed, to run an internal conference – will solve the organisation's problems. Misapplications of this kind have obviously made some organisations less than enthusiastic about the model and have been another factor in limiting its diffusion. Some organisations nevertheless become regular customers.

So we have the paradox that Leicester Conferences which are in their aims essentially subversive of the Establishment have themselves become an established institution, and with it the attendant risk of losing their task.

A major problem is a shift in the motivation of members. An increasing proportion enroll less with the intention of learning than in order to gain a form of accreditation. Some have connections with the institutions that run conferences based on the Leicester model and have already taken part in one or more of these: 'Leicester experience' may be necessary or at least helpful to progression to staff roles in these institutions. Also, there are various professional circles, especially in mental health, where attending (and surviving) a Leicester Conference has almost become a **rite de passage**, or carries some cachet. And beyond these two categories there are others who have been primed by previous members and have an idea in advance of what to expect. The proportion of 'naïve members', lacking in such external connections and in prior knowledge, has diminished. The cognoscenti, who outnumber them, tend to bring, in addition to their (at best) mixed motivations, some prefabricated defences: for example, adopting an observing, interpretive role – a pseudo-staff role - as a way of avoiding involvement; using psychological jargon to outface the 'naïve members' trying to set up situations that will defend them against the uncertainties of the member role by demonstrating their competence in their external professional roles. ('Casualties', as we have seen, may perform a useful function for mental health professionals). In practice, after a day or two, as a consequence of the dynamics of the total institution (with the help of interpretation from staff) the overwhelming majority of members find that they become involved – they 'join' – almost in spite of themselves. Other difficulties remain. Inexperienced members, feeling excluded by an in-group that has a psychological jargon of its own, may come to believe that what is to be learned from the Conference is a language.

However, the problems of institutionalisation are more insidious than that. The model is in constant danger of becoming a movement. A movement is fed by and feeds ritual. There are quite subtle pressures on staff to become priests of the ritual. The director and those staff who have taken part in several successive Leicester conferences find difficulty in putting boundaries around **this** conference. Newer staff, like inexperienced members, may feel pushed into an out-group, with all the uncertainties and anxieties of the rest of staff projected onto them. A new director or associate director will be the object of envious attack – which may be not at all subtle. Institutionalisation makes it even more difficult makes it even more difficult to hold onto the reality that so far as **this** conference is concerned we are all inexperienced and that what we think we know from the past may be more of a hindrance than a help in understanding what is in the present.

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